

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 322, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP.

March 15, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department's views on S. 322, a bill to establish the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership in the States of New York and Vermont.

While a feasibility study has found the Champlain Valley area appropriate for designation, we recommend that the Committee defer action on S. 322 until program legislation is enacted that establishes guidelines and a process for designation of national heritage areas. Last year, the Administration sent to Congress a legislative proposal to establish such guidelines and a process for designation. This year, the Administration is working on a similar legislative proposal, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue. Absent enactment of such program legislation establishing guidelines and a process for designation, we will look at a number of options, including consideration of potential offsets within the National Heritage Area Grants Program.

Another reason we are recommending deferral is that given current fiscal constraints, any discussion of particular national heritage areas should be consistent with the President's budget. Funding in the FY 2006 President's Budget for the National Heritage Area program combined with funding from the First Lady's Preserve America program, the Save America's Treasures

program, and historic preservation grants will go a long way toward supporting local efforts to preserve cultural, historical, natural, and recreational resources that reflect our nation's heritage.

S. 322 would establish the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership. This area includes communities containing thematically related resources across the States of New York and Vermont as defined by the linked navigable waterways and associated lands of the Champlain Valley. Specifically, this region encompasses the waterways of Lake Champlain, Lake George, the Champlain Canal, and portions of the upper Hudson River. The associated lands include portions of Grand Isle, Franklin, Chittenden, Addison, Rutland, and Bennington Counties in the State of Vermont, and portions of Clinton, Essex, Warren, Saratoga, and Washington Counties in the State of New York. The bill also would designate the Lake Champlain Basin Program as the management entity for the national heritage area.

In 1609, Samuel de Champlain arrived on the shores of the lake that the Abenaki people called “the waters between.” As the name suggests, the waterways formed the territorial boundary between the Western Abenakis and the Iroquois Confederacy. Champlain's initial encounter with Native Americans marked the beginning of European exploration, settlement, and conflicts that intensified over the next two centuries. These conflicts, waged on and along the Champlain waterways, included territorial battles among Native Americans, the Seven Years (or French and Indian) War, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. The conclusion of the War of 1812 largely brought peace to the region and enabled the Champlain waterways to support peaceful pursuits and serve, as they had long before the wars, as a trading route between regions. On July

6, 1909, President William Howard Taft, speaking at Fort Ticonderoga, summed up the importance of the Champlain Valley saying: “This was the passageway, and here were fought the battles contended for two hundred years, and as we may now say, never to recur.”

In the 1999 special resource study for Champlain Valley, the National Park Service concluded that “the Champlain Valley clearly merits designation of a national, or arguably international, heritage corridor.” The main reasons for the study’s conclusions, based on interim national heritage area criteria, are outlined below. In addition, the public review period for the special resource study revealed public support for designation of a national heritage area. A clear majority of the written comments (72%) stated support for designation of a national heritage corridor, citing such advantages as greater support for preservation, improved coordination, better education, and economic gains resulting from heritage tourism.

The area’s key themes, “Making of Nations” and “Corridor of Commerce” are reflected by resources that are outstanding in both quantity and quality. The considerations that gave the Champlain Valley its exceptional strategic importance prevailed over an extended period. This created a layering of history, a profound accumulation of physical record in the great fortifications, such as Fort Ticonderoga, and in the exceptional collection of historic shipwrecks found in the cold depths of the waterways. The most notable of the thematically related resources possess exceptional integrity. One is a unit of the National Park System, Saratoga National Historical Park, which encompasses the lands where the two battles of Saratoga were fought and the British invasion was halted, an event considered to be the turning point of the American Revolution. Eight resources have been designated as National Historic Landmarks:

Fort Crown Point, Fort St. Frédéric, Fort Ticonderoga, the *Land Tortoise*, Plattsburgh Bay, Valcour Bay, Mount Independence, and *Ticonderoga* Steamboat. Numerous other important sites are found throughout the region and are opened to the public as state historic sites or as private museums.

Due to their cold, fresh water, Lake Champlain and Lake George contain what is considered to be the finest collection of shipwrecks in North America. Lake George contains the remains of numerous bateaux, plus the French and Indian War radeau, *Land Tortoise*, described as the oldest intact warship in North America. Lake Champlain contains the remains of Benedict Arnold's last unexplored gunboat. The remnants of the British and American fleets from the 1814 Battle of Plattsburgh Bay rest near Whitehall, with other relics still lying in Plattsburgh Bay. Outstanding examples of shipwrecks representing the commercial era include: a horse-powered ferry believed to be the world's only surviving example; the steamboat *Phoenix*, considered to be the oldest surviving steamboat hull in the world; and the *Water Witch*, considered to be the oldest completely intact commercial vessel in America.

The resources of the Champlain Valley are best managed through public/private partnerships due to the multiplicity of ownership and the fact that they are distributed over a large geographic area. Because of the importance of Lake Champlain and Lake George to the region, numerous federal, state, local, and nonprofit organizations are involved in various aspects of managing and planning for the natural, cultural, historic, recreational, and heritage tourism resources of the region, including the Lake Champlain Basin Program, the Lakes to Locks Passage initiative, and the Champlain Valley Heritage Network. Plus, there are over 60 nonprofit organizations and

historical societies in the Champlain Valley active in the areas of historic preservation, education, planning, and stewardship of historic sites.

The area reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folkways of a number of native and immigrant groups who peopled the region over the last several centuries. These groups included: the Abenaki and Iroquois, French lumberjacks and fur trappers, New England Yankee settlers, Quakers, French Canadian and Irish mill workers, Lithuanian and Ukrainian iron mine workers, and Swedish forge operators. The stories of the Native Americans and the many immigrant groups who came to this area for different reasons provide a glimpse into the process of early migration, settlement, and assimilation that characterizes the region.

The public education and heritage tourism potential for the Champlain Valley is immense. Almost three-quarters of a million people live in the region, and millions more live within a day's drive. The region contains over 400 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 18 of which are designated as National Historic Landmarks, as well as eight National Natural Landmarks. These important sites, along with the region's numerous museums offer an enormous potential to provide in-depth educational opportunities through thematic linkages. The education potential of this region is complemented by its proximity to the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, creating additional opportunities for linking educational programs. In addition, Lakes Champlain and George are recognized as preeminent recreational resources. The lakes and their shores offer a wide range of easily accessible recreational opportunities. On Lake Champlain alone, there are over 100

public boat-launching areas, nearly 50 commercial marinas, and nearly 70 public beaches. Plus, there are over 30 major parks, forests, and recreation areas within the region.

This concludes my testimony on S. 322. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any of the members of the subcommittee may have.